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## Across Arabia:

Or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for the Forty Thieves.

By "NONAME."



Upon the ground in the center of the encampment and bound to stakes was the figure of a man. His eyes were turned skyward and he saw the air-ship. The Arabs did not perceive the air-ship until it was almost down upon them. Then the commotion was fearful. They broke right and left in the deadliest of terror.



# ACROSS ARABIA;

— OR —

## FRANK READE, JR.'S SEARCH FOR THE FORTY THIEVES.

### A Weird Story of the Land of Mystery and Magic.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Magic Mine," "Under the Great Lakes," "Across the Milky Way," etc., etc.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### NEWS FROM ARABIA.

FRANK READE, JR., was planning a trip to Asia with his new air ship, the Crescent. He had designed a tour of research and adventures among the hordes of the Steppes.

But just as the arrangements were concluded an incident occurred which induced him to slightly alter his plans.

He did not abandon his plan of a trip to Asia, but instead of going to the Steppes he decided to visit Arabia, the land of mystery and magic. The home of robbers and predatory tribes, the place of deep defiles and endless caves.

The reason for this change of ~~name~~ was a ~~very~~ notable one, and came about in an unusual fashion.

From time immemorial Arabia has owed sovereignty to no one dignitary. Her provinces are ruled by various emirs and sheiks, and these tribes are ~~ever at war~~ with each other. Pillage and plunder rule, the stronger descending upon the weak.

Sheik Suleiman Ayotr was one of the most powerful of these petty rulers. He was also the most learned.

At his palace were highly-salaried tutors from France, from Russia and from the United States. Sheik Suleiman could therefore speak all these languages and read the newspapers of these countries, thus keeping in touch with the world.

More than this, Suleiman showed his good sense and advancement by sending his favorite son Azya to the United States to be educated. He was a student at Harvard College.

The sheik himself, however, could not be induced to leave his country. In fact, the affairs of his province demanded his constant attention.

Especially was this so at the present time, for incidents of an exciting sort had arisen, and actually threatened the safety of his kingdom, if such it could be called.

First reports of tragedies, not a stone's throw from the palace, began to come in.

Then robberies, mysterious and inexplicable, occurred. Even one of the treasury vaults was entered and completely depleted, the six armed guards being found at the threshold with throats cut.

And yet not a clue to the identity of the perpetrators could be found. But every few days some rich man of the province would receive a mysterious note, demanding a certain large sum for ransom on penalty of death.

As surely as he failed to comply with the demand he would be found dead, sometimes in his own house. In all cases these written messages were signed:

"THE FORTY THIEVES."

In vain the shrewdest detectives in Suleiman's service tried to ferret out the mystery. Everything was done to bring the Forty Thieves to the executioner's block.

But they could not be tracked nor entrapped.

It was believed that they inhabited a certain high table-land, with inaccessible sides, rising a thousand feet above the plain about. The underground way to this was their secret.

No device could be rigged to safely ascend this mighty height. It

was tried once with a balloon, but the luckless aeronauts did not return.

In this extremity Suleiman one day read in a paper from the United States, an account of Frank Reade, Jr. and his air ship.

The sheik was at once excited. He called in his councilors, and soon a messenger was on his way to Port Said, and thence to Europe, whence Azya, the ~~son of Harvard~~, was cabled:

"See Frank Reade, Jr., and offer him ten thousand paras to come to Arabia with his air ship, and help ferret out the Forty Thieves."

"SIGNED, SULEIMAN AYOTR, SHEIK."

The very moment Azya received this message, he went at once to Readestown and obtained an audience with the young inventor.

Frank became instantly interested in the handsome young Arabian prince. The project promised just what he wanted, plenty of adventure, and at once he accepted it.

Of course the report was spread everywhere that Frank Reade, Jr., was going to Arabia with his air ship to capture the Forty Thieves. This recalled the tales of Ali Baba, and the entrancing mysteries of the Arabian Nights.

A charm hung about the project. Interest in it reached fever height.

Frank received hundreds of applications from people of all classes and professions the world over, for the privilege of accompanying him upon his wonderful mid-air voyage.

But, of course, he rejected them all. His only companions were to be Barney, the Irishman, and Pomp, the negro, faithful servants, who had been with him through all his wonderful experiences, and Azya.

The young Arabian prince had just finished his term at college, and he was therefore at liberty to go. Besides, he was desirous of paying his father a visit.

The Crescent was all in readiness. The first trial trip had been made, and she was found to be perfect in every respect.

In building the air-ship Frank had departed greatly from previous plans.

He had adopted the lines of a Greek galley with most picturesque effect. The gracefully rounded bow and swan neck of the air-ship added to its architectural beauty.

The Crescent throughout was largely constructed of a very light and thin metal made of an alloy of aluminum, steel and other metals.

This was deemed lighter material than wood or any other thing which could be used. Certain it was that the Crescent was wonderfully buoyant and yet firm and strong in every part.

In the air-ship's sides there were large observation windows of plate glass. Aft was a high poop deck with a guard rail. Amidships was the cabin and forward the plot house with its keyboard and powerful electric search-light.

The propelling power of the air ship was of course electricity, furnished by powerful dynamos. A huge propeller was affixed to her stern. The lifting power was furnished by huge rotascopes, three in number, capable of revolving at a terrific speed, and cleaving a way upward through the atmosphere.

The equilibrium of the airship was maintained by means of weight carefully placed in the keel. She was so nicely balanced that even the



strongest wind, aside from a hurricane, could influence her in her course.

The interior of the Crescent was fitted up handsomely. Frank had spared no pains or expense.

Suffice it to say that the Crescent was a marvel of mechanical ingenuity and skill. Her equal did not exist on the earth.

And in this cleverly arranged air ship Frank Reade, Jr., intended making a long flight of thousands of miles, over the seas and across Arabia.

An unheard of, unparalleled feat. Words are inadequate to describe it.

However, Frank was as cool and matter-of-fact about it as could well be imagined.

When the hour came for the departure he merely walked aboard the air ship and gave the word to Barney to start the electric engines.

He had left the machine shops in the care of a trusty foreman, and his business affairs were all in ship-shape order. He took a sweeping look at Readestown, and then said to Barney, who was at the keyboard in the pilot house:

"Press lever No. 10."

"All right, sor!" cried the Celt, and executed the order. The next moment the Crescent shot up into the air like a rocket.

Azya, the Arabian prince, stood beside Frank at the air ship's rail. It was a novel sensation to him.

As the earth receded like a railroad train, and trees, houses and other objects became mere dots upon the landscape, he fairly screamed:

"Allah, il Allah! We shall never return!"

Frank smiled grimly and said:

"Have no fear, Prince Azya. There is no doubt of your return."

"And we shall not fall, effendi?"

"No."

"Bismallah!" ejaculated the prince, and was silent.

Upward flew the air ship until the earth was a vast map beneath them; then Barney shut off speed and set the propeller at work.

The course was set east by north. The Crescent was soon speeding on her way like a rocket.

Cities and villages, lakes and rivers, mountains and valleys, all passed in a panorama beneath the air ship, until at length night shut down darkly.

The sky was overcast, and great black clouds were about the Crescent.

It was a curious sensation to go shooting into a bank of these, earth and sky being for a time shut from view. Then the air ship would glide out of the fleecy mass only to shoot into another.

At times the stars twinkled above like a myriad of little lanterns. Then lights from the earth were seen.

But of a sudden across the great canopy of the sky there crashed a peal of deafening thunder.

Lightning flashed fiercely and luridly about the air ship.

This alarmed Prince Azya a trifle, until Frank assured him that there was no danger whatever.

Yet, as the air currents began to rock the Crescent violently, Frank deemed it best to be on the safe side and gave Barney an order to send the Crescent up higher.

The air ship shot up until far above the battling elements.

They were safe here, but the view of the storm raging below was grand in the extreme.

The search-light was turned downward upon it, and the lightning's glare vied with the electric blaze. For several hours the storm raged fiercely.

Then it cleared, and the earth lay dark and monstrous far below. The Crescent descended a mile and then drifted on through the clear atmosphere.

There was little sleep for the voyagers that night.

None quitted the deck until near daylight. Prince Azya had witnessed a scene which he would not forget to the end of his days.

## CHAPTER II.

### ACROSS MOROCCO.

WHEN daylight came all but Barney were sleeping, exhausted nature having demanded a rest.

But the scene had greatly changed. Below lay the vast rolling expanse of the ocean.

Ships and steamers were seen cutting their way across the great waste. They were but dots as viewed from the air ship.

Shortly after daylight Pomp came tumbling out to relieve Barney.

The ducky had aroused himself reluctantly, for he was very sleepy. Therefore when he came on deck he was feeling a bit cranky.

Barney saw this at once and a grin overspread his face.

The two were the warmest of friends, but the keenest of practical jokers. Nothing pleased them better than a ruction or a scrap of any kind.

So Barney at once seized the opportunity presented. He looked keenly at Pomp, and said:

"Be me sowl, I thought yez wud niver turn up. Shure, I'm nigh dead fer the want av sleep."

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp; "don' yo' fret. Yo' will get yo' chaine."

"Not if I had to depind on yez!"

It was not the words, but the way in which Barney spoke them that aroused Pomp. The coon was on edge.

"Yo' neber was good fo' nuffin' but to sleep, anyway!" he snapped.

"Phwat's that?" said Barney, affecting anger. "Be me sowl, ye slept as much as yez, shure, I'd niver do anything else."

Pomp shook his woolly head like a mad bull. He snorted angrily:

"Look out dar, chile! Don' yo' git me too mad!"

"Phwat wud yez do about it?" asked Barney, insolently.

"Golly!" ejaculated Pomp, rolling his eyes about. Then he lowered his head and made a dive for the Celt.

Barney nimbly leaped aside, and Pomp's cranium came in contact with the rotoscope shaft. The shock was a terrific one, and would have brained an ordinary man.

But though it staggered Pomp he quickly recovered, and the blow had the effect of adding fuel to the flame. He made another lunge at Barney.

"Whurroo!" cried the Celt. "It's a foight yez want, eh? Shure, yez shall have it!"

And Barney made a biff at the coon, but this time Pomp's aim was true, and his head came in contact with the Celt's stomach.

Barney went down, but Pomp went with him.

Then they closed in a terrific struggle. They rolled about the deck, tugging and panting furiously.

Neither seemed to gain the ascendancy for a time. How long the scuffle would have lasted it was impossible to guess, had it not been for the appearance of Frank on deck, who had been aroused by the uproar.

This settled the affair at once. Barney and Pomp scurried away, Pomp to the pilot house, and Barney to his hammock, to sleep.

A short while later Prince Azya appeared on deck, and then Frank set the course of the air ship, and Pomp went down to prepare the breakfast.

After the morning meal, Frank and Azya went back to the deck, and made themselves comfortable in the bow, where they could see the ocean below, and pass the time in conversation and smoking.

Frank found the young Arabian prince very entertaining.

Azya told of his native land and many stories of its wonders. Frank listened with interest.

The robber bands, the deep caves in which they dwelt, and the strange legends of the far away land of magic, formed an entrancing topic.

Thus the days passed.

In course of time the Azores came in sight.

Here the course was changed to the southeast, so as to strike the thirtieth parallel of latitude. By following this they would pass directly over Morocco, Algiers, Tripoli, Egypt and the Suez Canal into Arabia.

Cairo was exactly on this parallel. The regions to be passed over were all of much interest to the traveler.

This prospect was a particularly pleasant one to Azya, and bid fair to be profitable as well.

For the Arabian prince expected to some day be called to the throne in his native land, and here was an opportunity to get a safe look at the domains of the Bashaws of these northern Africa countries.

After leaving the Azores the Madeiras were the next islands encountered, and then the peak of Teneriffe was seen far to the south.

They were now on the thirtieth parallel of north latitude. It now remained to push eastward along this line.

The coast of Africa soon came to view. Great white cliffs were succeeded by sandy plains.

In green valleys dotted here and there were miserable habitations. The natives were seen at various occupations.

Bands of savage-looking fellows roamed about mounted on fleet horses. In the fertile area, naked slaves were plowing and sowing, or working in the irrigating ditches.

"Allah!" exclaimed Azya, with a shrug of his handsome shoulders. "This country is not to be compared with Arabia. Our country is barren enough but this is worse."

"You are right!" agreed Frank. "It is really a wonder how these poor wretches keep soul and body together."

"It is said that their rulers are the most cruel in the world."

"That is likely," said Frank. "There are many slaves in Morocco and Algiers. Their masters are unprincipled, heartless tyrants and monsters."

Azya shrugged his shoulders.

"I have learned many things in America," he said. "Your government is the best in the world. When I come into power I shall try and govern accordingly."

"A praiseworthy purpose," declared Frank.

"There is hope for Arabia!"

"I trust there is!"

"If we can once bring the tribes together under one ruler and civilize them a little then we shall have the nucleus of a wonderful nation. For the Arabians, my people, are possessed of great skill, natural ability and wit."

"I hope you may be successful."

"It is a big undertaking," said Azya. "Of course such things require a great deal of time. It may not come in my time, but if I can lay the foundation, it will come, I feel sure."

Thus Azya, the plucky young prince reasoned and reflected. Frank looked at his handsome face and lithe form and felt the truth of his words.

He saw in him all the necessary attributes of the accomplished, the talented and successful man. These traits were inherent and not altogether acquired.

No more splendid specimens of manhood were to be found on the globe than these same Arabians.



They lacked development. From time immemorial they had not changed. And yet they were of that Aryan branch supposed to be the first people on earth, the descendants of Adam and of Noah.

Mount Ararat, the resting place of the ark was in their domains. Given prestige and opportunity, yet they had stood still, and it had remained for the people of the western world to develop all the advantages of civilization.

Azya had learned all this. He saw clearly that his people were thousands of years buried in the drift of ages.

How to reclaim them, to bring them to a high standard of progress and civilization was his problem. Yet he was a clever young man, gifted and well taught. He would not abandon the effort without a good earnest trial.

So Azya studied the habitations and life of the Morocco natives with interest, and found that his were not the only peoples deficient in modern advantages.

For the purpose of observation Frank allowed the air ship to descend to within a few hundred feet of the earth.

So when the Crescent went sailing over the Morocco villages, a great sensation was created among the villagers. Alarm and consternation seized them as a general thing.

They fled to their dwellings or fell upon their faces in terror. Men, women and children were alike terrified.

Many comical scenes were witnessed as a result. Again tragic events followed.

On one occasion Azya came near losing his life as a result of the terror of a Mohammedan guard. The fellow, in his terror, fired at the air ship.

The bullet grazed the Arabian's side, making a flesh wound. Slightly nearer, it would have pierced his heart.

But the second day after embarking upon the voyage across Morocco, a thrilling adventure broke the routine of the trip.

Coming suddenly to a bit of desert, a train of camels was seen. Behind these was a long file of naked blacks, with manacles riveted to a long iron chain which bound them together.

Beside them marched armed guards, fierce warriors, armed with yataghans and Turkish guns.

They were slaves procured in the depths of Africa, and were being taken to the capital to be sold at auction to the highest bidder. It was a fearful spectacle.

The poor blacks could hardly creep from exhaustion, and their backs were raw and bleeding from the bastinado. It was a scene of cruelty fit to make the human soul cringe.

Frank gave a start as he saw them, and shouted to Barney:

"Slacken speed, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

As the air ship swept down like a great bird of prey from the sky, the voyagers all crowded to the rail. The effect upon the natives was thrilling.

For a moment they seemed petrified with terror and amazement. The black slaves fell upon their faces.

The camel drivers tumbled from their high seats and sought refuge behind their animals. The horses shied with fear, and were bridled with difficulty.

Superstitious fear was no doubt in the minds of the desert travelers. They had never seen anything like this aerial monster before.

The Crescent stopped when but a hundred feet over their heads. Frank had directed Azya to speak, for he knew the Mohammedan tongue.

The Arabian prince leaned over the rail and shouted:

"Dogs of the devil, what do you, in Allah's name, with those poor black men?"

For a time no answer could be made, so great was the uproar. The terrified slave drivers tried to burrow in the sand to escape what they believed was the vengeance of Allah.

Again Azya leaned over the rail and shouted to them.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FATE OF THE SLAVE DRIVERS.

THE answer this time came back from one of the slave drivers, who closing his eyes, held his hands up in a supplicating fashion, and cried:

"Oh, Allah, thou most high and serene one! Forgive thy slaves! We are but simple merchants journeying with our slaves to our homes in Morocco."

"You are dogs and sinners!" cried Azya, in a terrible voice. "The black men are your brothers! Break their manacles and set them free, or Allah will visit vengeance upon you!"

"I beseech thee—" began the Arab slave driver.

"Silence, thou dog!" roared Azya. "Do as thou art bid! Bismillah! Dost want to lose thy head?"

The slave driver bowed to the earth. Then he spoke words of command to his companions.

At once a number of the Arabs began unlocking the gyves and setting the blacks free. Soon all of them were free.

"Be me sowl!" cried Barney, "I niver see anything worruk better than that. Bad luck to the omadhouns! Shure, it's murderers they are, anyway!"

"You are right!" cried Frank. "But their time has come. I mean that they shall never enchain their fellow beings again in this life!"

Azya turned in surprise.

"Oh, Effendi!" he exclaimed. "How will you prevent them?"

"Easy enough!" declared Frank. "Is there any reason why they should live?"

The Arabian's eyes flashed.

"They deserve death!"

"Then why spare them?" said Frank, forcibly. "The sooner the earth is rid of them the better for humanity!"

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "If yo' say so, I done git mah rifle!"

"Shure, I will, too, sor!"

"No, no!" declared Frank. "I will not rid the earth of the murderers in that way. The better plan is to turn the vengeance of the slaves upon them."

All were surprised.

"A grand idea!" cried Azya; "but how can you do it?"

"I will show you."

Frank then dictated some commands to Azya who again shouted to the terrified Mohammedans below.

"Dogs of the devil!" he cried. "Your hour of punishment is at hand. All ye who serve Allah, lay down your arms and praise Allah, if you would hope to be saved."

So thoroughly convinced were the slave drivers that it was Allah who was talking to them from the sky, that they dared do nothing but obey.

They cast their guns and swords upon the sands and fell upon their faces. The ignorant blacks stood in a stupor looking at the air-ship and then at their late captors.

Among them, however, were some black servants who had been long in slavery and who were helping the Arabs. They understood the Mohammedan tongue as well as their native lingo.

Azya went quickly to the other side of the air-ship and addressed them in tones just loud enough for them to hear:

"Black men, fear not. God is on our side. Seize the weapons of your oppressors and kill them, everyone."

The blacks started up and looked eagerly at the air ship, and then at their foe. The wild courage of the jungle came back to them.

Already they saw the distant African kraal from which they had been so rudely torn.

Already they heard the voices of friends and loved ones there mourning for their loss. What would it not mean to return? The wild hope gave them renewed courage.

So when Azya called again:

"Up and at them! They are accursed! Your hour of vengeance is at hand!" they sprang forward like a pack of wolves.

Too late the Mohammedans sprang to their feet.

The blacks had reached the yataghans and the guns. They outnumbered the slave drivers four to one.

And now with the Mohammedans unarmed, they had the advantage. They fell upon the foe like fierce tigers.

No quarter was given. The contest was a quick and decisive one.

In less time that it takes to tell it, the bodies of the cruel slave drivers strewed the plain. Their horses and camels and all their effects became the property of the blacks.

When the battle was over the liberated blacks fell again upon the faces in the sands to return thanks to their deliverers. Azya smiled with delight.

The affair, which to his mind was an eminent subserving of justice, had been to his liking. Again he shouted:

"My black children, mount the horses and camels, take thy weapons and flee to the south, back to the jungles and thy home and be happy!"

At once the blacks raised their voices in a chant of praise. They really believed that a supernatural power had given them their liberty.

It is needless to say that they obeyed the command of Azya. Soon they were making tracks for the Sahara at full speed.

Barney turned a handspring, and Pomp did a double shuffle. Azya and Frank gripped hands.

"There was a great wrong righted," declared the young inventor. "Those human hounds will entrap no more innocent, helpless people."

The air ship once more got under way. Night had begun to shut down, dark and silent.

The stillness of the desert was everywhere. No human being or habitation was in sight.

The next day they were to pass over a certain ruined city which Frank was anxious to see. But as it was only a few hours distant, they must pass over it in darkness unless a wait was made.

So Frank decided to wait where they were for the coming of day.

Just ahead was a tumble-down pyramid of stone and a clump of palm. A small pool was near by.

Doubtless this had once been an important oasis. Frank decided to wait here.

So, moving the air ship forward, he drew overboard an anchor which held the Crescent. She was barely fifty feet from the earth.

It was deemed safer to do this than to descend to the earth.

There was no outlook of a perilous sort. But Frank was determined to be upon the safe side.

The Crescent pulled at her anchor in the light breeze which rippled across the desert. As the night was perfect and the air so balmy, our voyagers were not at all disposed to turn in.

They sat by the rail smoking and chatting upon various subjects.

Suddenly Barney clutched Frank's arm.



"Mither av Moses!" he ejaculated; "is it dhrunk I am, or can yez see anything down there, Mистер Frank?"

He pointed down to the pyramid. Among the heap of stone there flashed a strong ray of light.

Frank gazed at it, and at once became interested.

It was too powerful for the light of a glow-worm; yet how could it be connected with any human agency?

"That is queer," muttered the young inventor.

The light burned steady and strong. It was like the flame of a lamp or a small fire.

By this time Azya had also become interested.

"By the Beard of the Prophet!" he exclaimed, "I mean to know what that is! Will you come, Effendi?"

"I will," replied Frank. "There is certainly something mysterious about that light. Lower the ladder, Barney!"

"All roight, sor."

The ladder of rope was thrown over and Frank and Azya descended. But when they reached the pyramid the light could be found nowhere. It had disappeared.

Frank produced an electric lantern and began to make a search of the vicinity. Soon he found a crevice among the rocks.

Then the odor of smoke came to his nostrils. He followed it and found a heap of hot ashes.

It had probably been fanned into a flame by the night breeze. At first Frank thought that it was the remains of a camp left by some wandering band of Arabs.

But Azya shook his head.

"Not so, Effendi," he said. "It is only the burning bush."

"The burning bush!" exclaimed Frank.

"Aye, Effendi."

Then Azya explained that a certain species of desert bush thrived in secluded places, until time had drawn the sap from the green leaves and branches. They became then like tinder and the fierce heat of the desert sun was sure to set them in a blaze.

That the bush had been ignited hours before was certain. Some remnant, however, had escaped until now to attract the attention of Frank.

Satisfied fully, the two explorers returned to the deck of the air ship. Nothing more of interest occurred that night.

But the next day about noon a number of tents were sighted. It was an Arab camp pitched in the heart of the wilderness.

As the air ship drew near, a strange and unusual spectacle was spread to view.

Upon the ground in the center of the encampment and bound to stakes was the figure of a man.

Around him were thronged a half hundred wild natives of the desert. In an instant the air ship's crew understood the situation.

The cruel Arabs had a prisoner in their clutches whom they were slowly torturing to death. This was a custom among them, most horribly cruel.

"Allah forbid!" gasped Azya. "They are devils!"

"We will soon make devils of them," said Frank, rigidly. "As I live, that poor devil is a European!"

The white skin and blonde hair of the prisoner at once furnished proof that he was not a native of the desert. Woe to the European who is reckless enough to fall into the clutches of Arabs.

It seemed as if they took special delight in the torture of such. The poor wretch's body was streaked with blood and his face was contorted with agony.

But his eyes were turned skyward and he saw the air-ship.

What his sensations were at that moment, pen cannot describe. That they were powerful goes without saying.

The Arabs did not perceive the air-ship until it was almost down upon them. Then the commotion was fearful.

They broke right and left in the deadliest of terror.

To them it was a fearful visitation from Heaven and they fled in the most abject of fear.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AT EL DERAVEH.

BARNEY and Pomp opened fire instantly with their Winchesters. The air ship settled down upon the ground beside the prisoner.

Frank sprung out and rushed to the unfortunate man's side, cutting his bonds. But he had fainted.

Azya applied a flask of brandy to his lips. For a moment it seemed as if life was extinct.

Then there was a quivering of the muscles. The eyelids lifted slowly and the prisoner's lips opened.

"God bless you! I—am saved!"

Then he became unconscious again.

"Let us take him aboard the air ship," said Frank.

"He will die!" declared Azya.

"We will not give him up while breath lasts," declared Frank.

Barney and Pomp had given the fleeing Arabs hot shot. They fled incontinently across the desert.

But at the sound of the rifles, and upon looking back and seeing that their pursuers were human beings, the Arabs suddenly recovered from their fright.

They desisted in their flight and sought the cover of sand dunes about. After a while they began to return the fire.

"Be jabbers they're onto us!" cried Barney. "Give it to 'em, naygur!"

"Mebbe dey will come back."

"Divil a bit! Av they do, it's a hot reception they'll git!"

Frank and Azya lifted the unconscious form of the prisoner and carried him to the air ship's deck.

Blankets were spread in the shade of an awning and he was stretched upon them. Then Frank began to dress his wounds.

He saw that none of them were likely to prove mortal.

They were flesh wounds, and while painful, not necessarily fatal. In a short while Frank had them all well bandaged.

Then slowly the rescued man came back to himself.

The next time he opened his eyes he looked up and smiled feebly. Then he said huskily:

"Frank Reade, Jr., God sent you to my assistance."

Frank gave a start.

"You know me?" he asked.

"And you know me?"

"I beg pardon—"

"Can it be that you have forgotten Tom Trull? Were we not friends in college?"

"Tom Trull?" gasped Frank. "You have changed. Heavens, man, what has done it?"

"The climate here and much suffering," replied Trull. "You see I have been five years in the desert."

"Mercy! what brought you to this out of the way part of the world?"

"I was one of a party of archæologists," replied Trull. "We have thoroughly explored Morocco, but one day a week ago this gang of fiends descended upon us and I was the only survivor. They would have finished me, but for your opportune arrival."

"The scoundrels!"

"They are worse. They are the worst gang of murderers in Morocco!"

"Then we will obliterate them as we did the slave drivers," said Frank, grimly.

"Good!" cried Azya. "Ah, Effendi, you would soon regulate the East."

"They deserve death," declared Frank. "I know what sort of a crew they are. It is time wasted to attempt reformation."

Tom Trull was now given food and drink. He was made comfortable on the blankets.

By this time the Arabs had begun to creep back toward their tents. The fire was waxing warm.

Barney and Pomp were, however, in a protected spot, so all was well. Yet Frank knew that it was best not to allow the foe to come too near.

So he went from one tent to another quickly and looked into them. They were unoccupied, and held only the effects of the Arab murderers.

It was but a few moments' work to liberate the camels and the horses and send them away over the desert. Then Frank touched a match to each tent.

In a few moments the Arab encampment was in flames.

The villainous gang were insane with rage at this. They even began to charge toward the air ship.

"Come aboard!" shouted Frank.

Barney and Pomp sprung over the rail. The next moment the Crescent rose about two hundred feet.

Then from this elevated vantage point a hot fire was poured down upon the foe. They retaliated, but with no effect at all.

The result was foreseen.

Soon they scattered and fled in all directions over the desert. Full half their number had been killed.

Frank was satisfied.

"That will do," he declared. "I trust the survivors will profit by the lesson. Once more eastward bound."

Barney opened the lever and the air ship sped away again over the desert.

The boundary of Morocco and Algiers was passed and steadily the Crescent drew down toward Tripoli.

One day the air ship passed directly over the city of Tripoli. A curious scene was witnessed.

It was not a long sail now to the Isthmus of Suez.

At Port Said, Tom Trull was to leave the air-ship. He was going to take a steamer down the Red Sea to India where a brother lived.

He had recovered very quickly from his injuries, and though thin and not very strong, he was able to take care of himself.

No alarming incident occurred until the air ship reached Port Said.

Here Trull, with deep expressions of gratitude, bade farewell to his rescuers. No lengthy stop was made in Port Said.

The air-ship crossed the isthmus and a small strip of Syria. Then one morning all came on deck and saw a rocky desert spread upon all sides.

"This is Arabia!" said Frank.

Azya's eyes were glistening.

"You see the poorest part of the country here," he said. "We shall soon see better things."

"Yes," agreed Frank. "This is, I presume, the great Rocky Desert!"

"It is, Effendi. But at El Deraveh, where my father holds sway, all is much better."

"Bejabbers, it looks loike a foiner place for robbers," averred Barney.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "I done bet dar am more'n forty ob dem hereabouts."



"Arabia is cursed with thieves," said Frank, "though it no doubt is not so bad as in ancient times."

"I hope for Arabia," said Prince Azya, with a wistful gaze about him. "Allah, will aid us!"

Surely a wilder desert the aerial voyagers had never seen.

Even Prince Azya himself had never seen so much of the Rocky Desert before. It was quite new to him.

Various little villages of tents and huts were seen at intervals, but in general the desert was untenanted save by hyenas.

Southward the voyagers kept.

After leaving the desert behind them, as Prince Azya predicted, the country grew better.

There was much really fertile soil, but little of it was tilled.

The Arabians are not farmers or even producers. There were walled towns, and here merchants had bazaars as in Constantinople, but the goods were brought into the country by armed caravans. They were not manufactured there.

Not that Arabia was entirely devoid of products. Spices and gums, woods and cloths, were articles of commerce, and to some extent of export.

In the southern part of the country, on the Persian Gulf and the shores of the Arabian Sea, Prince Azya assured his companions that there were many rich towns, governed by despots.

In fact nearly all of the Arabian rulers were rich so far as gold and silver went. The country produced these.

Suleiman Ayotr was a very rich ruler. In fact, Arabia held none more powerful.

El Deraveh seemed a long way in the interior of the country. But one evening Prince Azya pointed to some glittering lights on the horizon and declared:

"There is my home. You shall be my welcome guests."

An hour later the air ship hung over the city of El Deraveh.

It furnished the aerial voyagers a surprise even in the evening.

The streets, well lighted, lay in glittering sections below. Crowds of richly clad Arabians were walking through them.

One immense building, lighted up from bottom to top, Azya pointed out in particular.

"My father's palace!" he said.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Do you think he is on the lookout for you?"

"There is your answer," said Azya, as a cannon boomed on the city walls. Then it seemed as if pandemonium was let loose in the Arabian city.

Lights flashed, bonfires blazed, guns boomed and people rushed from houses in every part of the city.

The gaze of all was turned skyward. Then Frank remembered the cabin lights, and saw that they must have betrayed the presence of the air ship.

He sprang to the search-light and turned it on full force.

As the dazzling rays flashed across the beautiful city, the uproar increased. Azya was delighted.

"We shall own the town," he said. "Descend before the palace, Effendi. You can see that a reception is awaiting you there."

Frank saw that this was true.

A long file of soldiers encircled the square. There were gaily colored awnings and rich carpets spread on the pavements. Bands played lively airs.

Frank had thought of remaining aloft until daybreak. But he saw that this was out of the question now.

So he ordered Barney to lower the air ship.

Down it settled until it rested upon the carpeted square. Then Frank and Azya stepped down from the gangway.

In an instant a number of Arabian dignitaries were on hand, bowing to their waists. They led Frank and Azya up some steps and into the hall of the palace, which was all white and gold.

A thousand brilliant lights blazed in the place and showed hundreds of the Arabian nobles clad in the richest of Oriental costumes.

The scene was like fairyland, and Frank could not help but gaze upon it spellbound.

But foremost in the throng of richly clad dignitaries was a handsome white-bearded man in a cloak of gold and purple and white ermine.

This was Suleiman Sheik and ruler of El Deraveh. He held his arms wide open.

Azya saw this and rushed into them with joy.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE LAND OF ROBBERS.

THAT was a happy meeting between the sheik and his son. Azya hung for some while on his father's breast.

Then Suleiman suddenly gently released him and looked at Frank Reade, Jr.

Instantly Azya led Frank forward.

The young inventor bowed graciously and with dignity. Suleiman embraced him warmly and said in good English:

"Visitor from a country of wonders, you are welcome to El Deraveh. Everything Suleiman has is at your command."

Frank thanked the sheik and said, plainly:

"I hope to merit your gratitude by ridding you of the Forty Thieves."

"Allah's blessing on you, my son," replied the sheik with emotion. "I am sure you will succeed."

"He cannot fail my most high and serene father," said Azya.

All this while Barney and Pomp were aboard the air ship. Suleiman was anxious to visit and inspect the air ship, but first it was ordered that a feast should be served the visitors.

So the sheik insisted that Barney and Pomp should participate, and they were sent for.

Barney put out anchors to guard against possibilities, and left the Crescent to the jealous care of the sheik's guards. These stood with fixed bayonets about it.

For it was not known but that in the immense throng there might be some foe ready to do the air ship an injury. Such were the bold methods of the Forty Thieves.

The feast given by the sheik was grand beyond description, and lasted until daybreak.

At that time Barney and Pomp were so dazed with Oriental nectars and ambrosias, that they had actually to be carried to their berths aboard the Crescent.

Of course there was nothing left but to sleep the next day. It was late in the afternoon before Suleiman aroused, and requested a look at the air ship.

By this time Barney and Pomp were all right again. The Crescent's cabins were thrown open, and Suleiman came aboard.

The sheik was delighted beyond all power of expression. He agreed with Azya that the fate of the Forty Thieves was already as good as settled.

But Frank shook his head, and said:

"We cannot vouch for that until the last of the rogues is actually caught. There are many slips!"

Suleiman offered Frank all his soldiers, but the young inventor said:

"I have need of nothing. Great sheik, I can deal with the robbers quite alone!"

"Thou art a wonderful Genii," said Suleiman, fervently. "Allah bless thee!"

Azya, however, insisted that he must become one of the air ship's crew. Frank did not demur greatly, for he had taken a great liking to the young prince.

They were in the palace while this matter was being discussed. Barney and Pomp were aboard the Crescent.

A line of soldiers yet guarded the air ship. But in spite of them a daring attempt was made to destroy the Crescent.

Barney was scouring the brass work of the gangway, and Pomp was in the galley cooking.

Suddenly there dashed down the street and into the square a rider on a richly-caparisoned, milk white steed. He was a tall, magnificent looking man with a masked face.

His appearance was so sudden that for a moment the guards did not realize his purpose. His voice rang out like rolling thunder as he reined the white steed up short.

"Allah's curse upon the dogs of unbelievers! Death to them!"

Then he flung a small object at the Crescent. However, by the greatest of good fortune it fell short.

It dropped at the feet of the file of soldiers. As it touched the ground an awful explosion followed.

A tremendous hole was made in the pavings, and men and debris were hurled high in the air.

Some of the flying particles struck the air ship, but, beyond denting the shell a trifle, did no harm. As it chanced, none of the aerial voyagers were harmed.

For a moment all was confusion in the ranks of the soldiers. Full a dozen of their number had been blown to pieces. The smoke was so dense that it interfered with any immediate action.

When the Sheik's soldiers were able to act, not a sign could be found of the man on the white steed.

It is needless to say that the entire city was thrown into a state of most intense excitement.

Frank and Azya rushed out of the palace. The young prince fell upon his knees with thanks to Allah when he saw that the air ship was unharmed.

Everywhere soldiers were sent in pursuit of the white horseman.

But not a trace of him could be found. Sheik Suleiman offered a fabulous reward.

But Azya said:

"They are masters of magic, those Forty Thieves. We shall not catch this rascal right away!"

"Let this incident be a lesson to us!" said Frank. "We are losing time, besides endangering the air ship by remaining here. Let us start at once upon our mission."

Azya agreed with Frank and Suleiman gave his sanction.

In a few moments all were aboard the Crescent ready for the start. Thousands of Suleiman's subjects crowded the square.

As the Crescent sprang skyward, a great shout went up.

Guns were fired and bands of music played in the wild Arabian fashion. The air ship ascended a thousand feet.

Then a good view of the country about was had by daylight.

It was seen that Suleiman's country was of the best in Arabia. There were fertile valleys and green slopes.

Husbandmen tilled the soil of the valleys, and shepherds herded flocks upon the hillsides. All looked thrifty and prosperous.

As the air ship floated along above this beautiful region, Azya gazed upon it with pride.

"There is nothing better than this, Effendi," he said, "in your own proud land of America!"



"You have not seen the farms of the Great West," said Frank. "Yet, this is the best part of Arabia I have seen yet."

At this moment Azya pointed to a distant stupendous range of mountains.

"Yonder is the land of the magicians," he said. "If we find the den of the Forty Thieves it will be on that high plateau."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank, with interest. "That is the place we want to see!"

He leveled his glass upon the distant elevation and studied it a long while.

Nearer the air ship drew to the high mountain range. The spirits of the voyagers were now on the qui vive.

Soon it was near at hand. Then Frank was ready to admit that he had never seen a wilder, more uncanny looking region in his life.

The mountain peaks assumed all kinds of outlandish shapes. Almost any one of them could be conjured into the shape of a demon or a reptile of some kind.

There were defiles so deep that the darkness in them was almost that of midnight.

There were caves and weird nooks, recesses and wild beast dens. The forests were deep and tangled. The uplands rough and rugged.

A more capital place of hiding for robbers could not be imagined. Frank could not wonder that the author of the Arabian Nights had selected Arabia as the location of his fabulous tales.

All was apparently deserted, and no sign of human life was visible. Great flocks of vultures hovered in the air, while hyenas howled in the glens.

The Crescent sailed slowly and steadily over this region.

For hours it made a circuitous tour of the place. But not a sign of a robber was to be seen.

Azya did his best to locate some clew. But when nightfall came the searchers were bound to admit that nothing of value had been found.

The darkness which shut down was of the proverbial kind.

But for the electric lights nothing could have been seen. But Frank sent the pathway of the search-light flashing over the peaks constantly.

However, little was seen which suggested the presence of dwellers below. At one time Barney fancied he saw a man's figure among the rocks.

Finally Frank said:

"They are doubtless hiding. But it is hardly likely that they will continue that forever. If we wait I believe we shall yet hit something."

"We can do nothing but wait," agreed Azya. "They can hardly leave here without being seen!"

It occurred to Frank as a good plan to shut off the electric lights at intervals and this he did. Once when he flashed them down suddenly into a defile he saw a horseman.

There was no manner of doubt.

The horse was milk-white. The rider could not be recognized. Only a moment was he visible.

How he vanished so suddenly or where he went could not be guessed. But Frank was reassured.

He knew that the rascals were in this part of the hills and time and patience must reveal their hiding-place.

For three days the air ship hung over the hills. On the third night Frank adopted a new plan.

He announced it to Azya:

"I shall take Barney," he said. "We shall leave the air-ship well armed and equipped and make a tour of exploration in the darkness of that defile yonder."

Azya was eager and excited.

"Oh, noble Effendi," he cried; "will you not permit me to go with you?"

Frank shook his head.

"I cannot," he said. "Two must remain aboard the air ship. The risk will not be so great for Barney as for you."

"And why not as great?"

"You are the prince of this land. They would give you no chance for life. Again Barney is stronger, and a great fighter in case we should meet with trouble."

"Then you mean to explore the defile?"

"I do."

Azya was disappointed. But he could offer no objection, and said: "Allah be with you! I beg you to lookout for their magic."

"Magic I do not fear," laughed Frank. "But fear not! When we return we shall have learned something."

"I pray it may be so."

The air ship's lights were extinguished, and she descended slowly into the defile. The darkness was heavy, and could almost be felt.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN ADVENTURE.

SUCH blackness Frank had never seen. Down into the defile the air ship settled.

Not since leaving El Deraveh had Frank experienced a thrill of fear. But as he and Barney slid down the rope ladder to the stony ground below, he could not help a bit of a chill.

The next moment they were alone in the defile and the air ship sprung upward. Alone in the region, almost in the den of the Forty Thieves.

Azya had bade them beware of magic. But as Frank was superstitious, of course, he had smiled at the Arabian's fear.

As the air ship vanished silently upward, and was to be seen again the sky only as a sort of black object, Frank and Barney stood for some moments silently in the defile.

Frank's motive for this was a warrantable one.

He knew that it was not at all impossible, but that some of the robbers had been watching the air ship and had seen it drop into the defile.

In that event they might be in ambush near. It was necessary to proceed with great wariness.

Frank had spent some years upon the western plains and was familiar with Indian strategy, which is acknowledged to be the best in the world.

So he put a hand on Barney's arm and kept very still. The minutes passed and a half hour passed. Then a peculiar chirp like that of a cricket was heard, not a dozen yards distant.

Frank tightened the pressure on Barney's arm. Then they kept perfectly still, hardly daring to breathe.

Frank knew well enough that no cricket uttered that call.

A moment later his assumption was verified. There was a slight crunching of gravel, and the two watchers, with their eyes a little more accustomed to the darkness, distinguished a shapeless object but a yard distant.

As they were against the cliff wall they were not so easily seen. At least the unknown betrayed no knowledge of their presence.

But in a few moments he again gave the cricket signal. It was answered a few yards away. Then a startling thing happened.

The defile became suddenly filled with dark figures.

They were so near to Barney and Frank that the latter could have touched them. That they were members of the robber gang there was no doubt.

They indulged in hurried, whispered consultation. Being in the Arabian tongue all this was unintelligible to Frank.

Like silent statues they stood in that little patch of gloom and were not discovered.

After a few moments of consultation, the robbers flitted away in the gloom and the danger was past. Frank drew a deep breath.

He realized now what he had to contend with. No North American Indian was more strategic or wary than these Arabian robbers.

He must meet their tactics with the same method. It did not take him long to decide what to do.

He knew that the danger was for the moment practically over. After a sufficient lapse of time he led Barney away down the defile after the robbers.

Like silent shadows they crept on in the pursuit. But before they had gone far they knew that the chase had ended.

The objects of their pursuit had scattered and gone they knew not whither. Here was a quandary.

For a moment Frank had allowed himself to fancy that he might follow them to their lair. Once this was discovered, the young inventor felt sure of his game.

But now, with the robbers scattered in a dozen directions, he knew not which to take.

"Be me sowl," whispered Barney, "they're afther givin' us the go-by this toime, Mister Frank."

"Well, we're stumped just now," admitted Frank. "But we'll not give up. Perhaps any of the villains, if followed, will eventually return to the den."

"Then we'll kape right on, sor?"

"Yes; it is the easiest way."

However, the deep and inky black defile was now merging into a sort of depression or pocket in the mountains. Consequently the darkness was less dense.

It was necessary now to proceed with greater care. Suddenly Barney clutched Frank's arm.

"Mither av Moses!" he gasped. "Phwat is that, sor?"

He pointed to the right in the gloom where was a slight knoll or mossy mound. Something like a glittering star glimmered in its side.

Frank rubbed his eyes and looked hard at it.

For a moment he was puzzled. He thought of some precious stone, like a certain diamond which has the power of brilliant light in darkness. Again it occurred to him as the luminous eye of some serpent, or even a wild beast.

But after a moment he saw that it could not be the latter. So he drew nearer, stared again, then gave a great exclamation:

"By Jove!" he gasped. "It is a hole in the ground!"

Literally this was true. Frank threw himself down beside the mound. He applied his eye to a small crack in the ledge which cropped out from beneath the growth of moss.

What he saw stupefied him. He gazed a long while.

He saw full fifty feet below, through what seemed the ceiling of enormous underground chamber, a sight such as it would have been hard to equal, even in the imagination.

All the tales of Aladdin and his lamp, of the fabled palaces he was able to procure, paled before this glimpse of the underground Alhambra.

Great columns of white marble and onyx, faded into a vista before his vision. There were white spotless floors, golden lamps in scores, the richest of tapestries, loveliest of rugs and Oriental furnishings.

A great gilded throne sat under a golden and crimson canopy. The odor of rich incense filled the air.

Frank gazed long at the wonderful scene.



When a clear comprehension of all came to him. He saw that this was the underground retreat of a powerful and rich federation, the Forty Thieves.

The cavern had been fitted up like an emperor's palace, with booty which they had procured in various raids. The natural character of the rock had enabled them to get the marble and onyx effect.

But Frank saw no living soul in the place. This seemed strange. Was it deserted? But, of course, this was wholly unlikely, and even as he discarded the thought, he saw the glitter of gold and satin, and a young woman, fair as a goddess, came with graceful tread through the arches.

She walked quickly to the throne, and sank down upon the velvet cushions. Her face was upturned, and it seemed to Frank as if she was looking directly at him.

For a moment he felt a bit fearful that he was exposed, but the next moment he recognized the impossibility of this.

At that distance it was not likely that she could see his eyes through the crack in the roof.

She was of the radiant Arabian type of beauty, a most pronounced brunette. Her lips were like rich cherries, and her cheeks tinted with the soft pink of the sea shell. Her eyes, with their starry lashes, were lovely beyond compare.

In all his life Frank had never seen her equal.

Who was she?

This was the question he asked himself. It was not easy to guess. Yet he made the hazard.

Who could say that she was not the daughter of the robber chief. Her dresses were as rich and costly as those of a princess. Diamonds studded her plump arms and revelled in her hair.

Of course this was all the booty of the robber band. Yet it added to the girl's beauty, though she would have been wondrous without them.

"Be me sowl, Misther Frank," whispered Barney, who was at his shoulder also peeping in at the crevice, "did yez iver see the loikes av that? Is it not wonderful, sor?"

"Indeed it is, Barney," agreed Frank. "I think she must be the daughter of the robber chief."

"Shure sor, that is loikely."

For some while the beautiful Arabian girl reclined there on the soft cushions of the dais. Then she began to sing, low but wondrously sweet.

The words Frank could not understand, though he caught the name of Allah and judged it a hymn. The young inventor was entranced.

Several verses of the Arabian song she sang. Then there appeared from the arches of the underground palace, two negroes, black as coals. They were dressed in the richest of silks, and each carried a banner of purple and gold.

They advanced with stately tread, and when they had reached the throne, stood each on an opposite side of it. Then Frank guessed the truth.

The court of this robber kingdom was about to open. The ruler himself would soon appear.

Nor was the young inventor's guess far wrong. Suddenly from the distant arches came the soft sound of plaintive music.

Then the musicians themselves appeared, playing on reeds at the head of quite a lengthy and stately procession.

Attendants richly dressed, walked next to the musicians. Then appeared a strong built, dark-browed man, arrayed in a long purple gown of velvet. A huge sword hung at his girdle, and upon his head was a circlet of gold and diamonds.

A robber king he truly was. This then was the home of the Forty Thieves, and this was their palace underground.

Frank felt a thrill of triumph at the discovery. For the first time he felt a repugnance to the task he had undertaken.

This was the extermination of this very same assembly, upon whose grand person he was now looking. Though he knew that they were thieves, yet he also knew that all other tribes in Arabia, even Suleiman's, were the same.

After the robber king came a long line of nobles, all dressed much the same, but without the circlet of gold.

Out of curiosity, Frank counted these purple-clad dignitaries. To his surprise there were just forty of them.

At once he understood that these were the Forty Thieves. That each was an Oriental noble and had under him a band of armed men.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN INVITATION.

Also Frank saw that the Forty Thieves were numerically strong as compared with the average robber bands.

Their secret methods, their life of retirement and obscurity was their safeguard. Woe to the ordinary guard of janissaries or soldiers which would attempt their destruction.

How extensive these mountain caverns were, Frank could not guess. But he easily understood the disadvantage under which an attacking force would labor. In fact, the mountains themselves were inaccessible.

Armed men followed the robber king and his retinue of forty men. The procession marched up to the throne where the king took his seat. The young girl arose and kissed him.

This settled all doubt in Frank's mind that she was his daughter. He was well satisfied.

The nobles arrayed themselves about the throne. Several hundred armed men were now in the place.

Frank divined that this was a great meeting of the robber king's court. That it met for some important purpose was certain.

What that purpose was the young inventor was anxious to know. But he could not understand a word spoken.

Therefore an interpreter was the thing needful. He thought of Azya.

The young prince could understand, of course, every word. But he was far away aboard the air ship.

Frank drew back from the crevice and looked upward. He saw the air ship, a dark object far above.

The signal agreed upon had been the flashing of an electric lantern. At sight of this the air ship was to descend.

Frank considered the chances and the risk for a moment. Then he said:

"I will do it!"

He drew the lantern from beneath his coat and turned on the current from the small battery. Almost instantly it was answered from above, and then the Crescent began to descend.

Down it settled like a huge night bird. Frank guessed shrewdly that the vicinity was fairly clear of robbers, for they were undoubtedly all in the underground palace.

When the air ship was within fifty feet of the earth, a rope ladder was thrown over. Frank mounted quickly to the deck.

He was met by Azya.

"Well," asked the young prince, eagerly, "what have you seen. Effendi?"

"The robber king's court," replied Frank.

The prince gave an eager cry.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Directly beneath us," replied Frank.

"Beneath us, Effendi?"

"Yes."

"But—I see nothing but darkness."

"Come with me. Pomp, hold the air ship steady right here."

"A'right, sah!"

Azya was only too eager to follow Frank over the rail. Both slid down to the ground.

Barney was yet at the crevice. He gave way to Frank and Azya. The Celt exclaimed:

"Shure, Misther Frank, wan av the omadhouns is afther makin' a big speech."

Azya was now at the crevice and listening for all he was worth. Every word was distinguishable to him.

The scene, incomparably grander than his own father's court at El Deraveh, astonished him. But he became presently interested in the doings of the court.

"Ali Mandah and the Forty Thieves," he muttered. "He is their king. His head shall hang upon our city gate before a week, or Azya will yield his soul to Allah!"

For a long time the council of robbers continued. At times arguments were heated and much anger was manifested. After a while, however, Ali Mandah, the robber king, arose and commanded the nobles to withdraw.

The court was at an end.

The soldiers marched out in a file. The music died away, and then for the first time, Azya caught sight of the young Arabian girl.

He gave a start, fastened his gaze upon her long and earnestly, then ardently, while the color rose high in her cheeks.

"Lovely Zosia, the daughter of Ali Mandah!" he muttered. "I have heard much of her peerless charms, and by my hope of Heaven, they are unsurpassed. Should Ali Mandah fall into my hands—well, no harm shall come to her!"

Then he turned to Frank Reade, Jr. His eyes glistened.

"Good Effendi," he said, "we know much now. It has been decided by this council to entrap you and your air ship by means of a false pretence. They will offer to treat with you, even to surrender and decoy you with your air ship to the earth. Then they will spring upon and destroy you."

Frank's eyes opened wide.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "So that is their plan, eh?"

"It is, most gracious Effendi!"

"It is well that we know that. So they will affect to treat with us?"

"Aye."

"Let it be so."

"What will you do, Effendi?"

"We will go back to the air ship and wait. Our game must be a counter-plot. We will deceive them, while they think they are deceiving us!"

"Good!" cried Azya with delight. "Ah, did you see the beautiful daughter of the robber king?"

Frank looked keenly at Azya.

"Yes," he said, quietly.

"Was she not as radiant as the sun?"

"She was very beautiful!"

"No harm must come to her if she falls into our hands. Neither must my father see her."

Frank was astonished.

"What do you mean, you sly rogue?" he asked.

"Allah be with us, Effendi! My father would seize her for his harem!"

"And you——"

Azya's eyes flashed.



"She has captured my heart at sight. Zosia must be Azya's wife!"

"But if she refuses——"

Azya looked surprised.

"You do not know Arabian women!" he said, and the subject dropped.

In a few moments they were again aboard the air ship.

As nothing further was to be gained that night, it was proposed that all turn in for much needed sleep, and this was done.

After breakfast the next morning, Barney, who was on deck, heard a strange sound from below. He went to the rail and looked down.

Standing on a spur of the mountain wall was an Arabian beating a drum of the kettle type. A white flag floated from a staff beside him.

Barney called Frank and Azya, and the latter said at once:

"A parley! What did I tell you, Effendi?"

"Well," said Frank, readily, "let us hear what the chap has to say."

Barney lowered the air ship until it was within easy speaking distance. Then Azya leaned over the rail and asked in the Arabian tongue:

"Dog of a robber, what are your needs?"

The truce bearer bowed to his waist and made reply:

"Great Ali Mandah, the chosen of the Prophet and the light of Asia, extends greeting to the people of the sky. His heart opens to them."

"Well, and what asks the great robber?"

"That the travelers from the sky will come to a banquet he has prepared. He makes them welcome to his palace."

"We do not see a palace?"

"It is hidden by the ground. Oh, light of the sun. Descend and thy slave will show thee the way."

Azya turned to Frank and interpreted all this.

"You hear," he said; "they have asked us to a banquet. Of course, we will not dare to accept."

"Why not?"

Azya looked amazed.

"We would be putting our heads in the lion's mouth," he said.

"It would be equivalent to death, Effendi."

"I do not believe that," said Frank, confidently. "I have no doubt of the purpose of Ali Mandah. But I have a plan as good as his!"

Azya was puzzled.

"And will you really accept of that invitation?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"But——"

"What?"

"Tell me of your plan?"

"If you fear the consequences, you may remain aboard the air ship."

Azya was convinced.

"Enough, noble Effendi," he said. "I cannot read your purpose, but I know that your power is great. I will not fear to go with you."

"Bejabbers, Mither Frank, an' will yez count me in, too?" asked Barney.

"Golly! it am mah turn now," declared Pomp.

Frank looked at the negro and said:

"Yes, it is Pomp's turn. You may remain with the air ship, Barney. Pomp will go to the banquet with us."

The coon turned a handspring and made a grimace at the Irishman. Barney chased him into the pilot house.

Azya leaned over the rail of the air ship and said:

"Tell your master, the Great Robber, that we will accept his invitation to attend his banquet."

The truce bearer vanished, and Azya turned to Frank, who said:

"Come with me."

Into the cabin they went. From a large chest Frank took out a suit of fine linked armor. This was in such pliable, fine meshes, that it could be worn next the body with ease, and none would suspect its presence.

Then he produced some caps seemingly of cloth. But by touching a spring in the visor, a veil of steel meshes fell down to the shoulders, leaving eye holes and protecting the head and face.

Azya examined it with surprise.

"It is bullet proof!" declared Frank. "Do not be afraid to don it. You are safe from bullet or sword thrust with that on."

"Wonders of Allah!" exclaimed Azya. "Am I to wear it?"

"Yes. I have several of these suits. We will each wear one. We can withstand an ordinary attack with safety."

Azya's eyes blazed.

"Ah!" he cried. "I can see why you do not fear to attend the banquet of the Great Robber!"

"Yet I do not rely altogether upon the armor for our escape," said Frank. "Something far different."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE ROBBERS' DEN.

Azya looked at Frank in amazement.

"What?" he asked.

"Strategy!"

"You puzzle me!"

"Wait and you shall see!"

And Azya was compelled to be satisfied with this. However, he donned the armor and his clothes over it.

Pomp and Frank did the same. Then they concealed in their pockets several small repeating pistols of Frank's invention and somewhat similar to the repeating rifle.

Thus equipped they felt plenty of confidence. Barney lowered the air ship and the three adventurers slid down the rope ladder to the ground.

Two of the robbers were in attendance and led the way among the rocks to a deep defile.

Turning suddenly, under an overhanging shelf, they entered a small cave. This had several windings and for a moment they were in darkness.

Instinctively all put hands to their weapons, but their fears were groundless, for the next moment they met with a great blaze of light and saw the mighty arches of the underground palace.

They were in a wonderful chamber chiseled out of the solid rock.

Marble and onyx pillars supported a roof of sky blue, with diamonds studding its surface to represent stars.

The wealth of kingdoms was in the place.

Huge Astrakan rugs and mats covered the stone floor. Golden sconces held silver candles and great lamps blazed in glass globes. There were hangings of costliest silk and velvet emblazoned with gold.

Through the centre of this chamber was a mighty table, laden with gold and silver flagons, pots, cups and plates, centuries old. In the centre of the table a wild boar was skewered, as fine a roast as one could wish.

Massive chairs of gold and plush were at the table, and behind each chair was a richly clad attendant with napkin and salver.

Midway in the long table was a mighty throne of gold and purple. On this sat the dark-browed robber king.

About him were half a score of his body servants. As his guests entered, Ali Mandah rose and stood beckoning them to seats opposite him.

Azya led the way.

Frank and Pomp followed, and they were seated opposite the robber king and within easy speaking distance.

Then Ali Mandah clapped his hands, and the Forty Thieves, in their rich robes, entered and seated themselves at the table.

The robber king sank back in his chair and made a gesture implying that all should eat.

Then the banquet began.

Our adventurers were hungry, and the novelty of the situation did not curb their appetites. They pitched in and did themselves justice.

The roasted boar's flesh was toothsome beyond compare. The Barbary figs, Egyptian grapes and the rice from far away Mongolia flavored the repast. All was washed down with Turkish wine and mead of honey. Surely it was a repast fit for the gods.

"Golly," exclaimed Pomp, "I've done eat mahs'lf full, Marse Frank. I've half a mind to become one ob dese robbers mahsef, fo' de sake ob sich lubly fings to eat!"

Frank and Azya laughed, and the latter said:

"A robber's life has its hard sides as well as the rosy. Then again we must remember that all this was bought with human blood."

"Exactly," agreed Frank. "Many an innocent soul was sacrificed to furnish the wherewithal for this splendid display."

"Don't say nuffin' mo'," expostulated Pomp. "I kain't eat anoder fink!"

By this time the repast was finished. Then suddenly Ali Mandah rose and held up a hand.

Instantly the silence of the tomb ensued in the banquet hall. A pin could have been heard to drop.

Our adventurers looked at the robber king, and saw that his gaze was fixed upon them.

There was something insolent in it, and a grim smile wreathed his lips. He spoke:

"My guests from the sky are more welcome than words can say. Have they partaken well of the repast?"

"Most noble ruler," said Azya, bowing with dignity, "we return thanks."

"Then was the meat good?"

"It was passing good, noble ruler."

"It is the custom for man to hunger and thirst the hardest just before the hour of his death."

Azya affected unconcern.

"Why speak of death in the midst of merrymaking?" he asked.

Instantly the Forty Thieves rose with one accord and shouted:

"Because it is thy portion, oh, son of Suleiman!"

Azya's face whitened. For a moment he nearly lost his self-control, and Frank even thought that a crisis was at hand.

But the king's hand went up, and the Forty Thieves sat down, and again silence reigned.

"My nobles have spoken the truth," said Ali Mandah. "Death is sooner or later the portion of all of us."

Azya's face cleared. Yet he did not feel quite sure of Ali Mandah's meaning.

"None are more ready and willing to meet death in a just cause than I, most noble ruler," said the prince, coldly. "Even though that death were visited upon me through treachery."

For a moment a shade of anger passed over Ali Mandah's face. But it instantly vanished.

"At a feast even foes must not quarrel," he said, lightly. "All threats are jests and hard sayings, but buncombe. Let it rest."

"I am content," replied Azya.

"You are my guests."



"Yet this is not your sole purpose in asking us hither under the protection of a truce. What do you ask?"

A frightfully malignant gleam came into the eyes of the robber king. His face was positively cruel, as he said:

"I ask that which you can give and for which I will make of you the richest prince on earth."

Azya did not reply. The robber king leaned forward and hissed:

"Your father's head!"

Lightning leaped from Azya's eyes. He forgot where he was, and all conditions. He leaped to his feet and would have sprung at the king.

"Dog! Devil! Dare to say that to me, and by Allah! I'll slay thee alive! I'll feed thy flesh to crows——"

He choked and stopped. Frank and Pomp had seized him by the shoulders.

At that instant every noble had sprung to his feet with drawn swords. But the king, Ali Mandah, sat cool and smiling on the gilded throne. When Azya had recovered himself and silence again reigned, he said with sarcasm:

"I thought the test would not fail. Were the truce thine it would not be kept. And yet, thou son of a dog, thou didst doubt Ali Mandah!"

"My father stands in my esteem only next to Allah!" said Azya, proudly. "Do you think you could tempt me to turn against him?"

"Of that I had no hope!" replied Ali Mandah. "Nor ever to make a lasting peace with thy father or thee. It must be forever as in the past, bitter war between us, for I can see that the rancor is thine and that were I in your power, as you are now in mine, my life would not be spared on a question of honor alone!"

Azya rose calmly.

"Seize me and strike off my head," he said, humbly; "but do not decry my honor. It is to me as sacred as Heaven."

Ali Mandah looked keenly at Azya. The malignant light in his eyes did not fade, however.

"It would be well for thee and thy father hadst thou not been born," he said. "For of thy city I mean that stone shall not be left upon stone."

"Spare thy threats!" said Azya. "If that is thy purpose in getting me here, then I will hie me hence at once and terminate the truce."

"I will not detain thee long," said the robber king, significantly. "To ease thy curiosity I will say, that my purpose was to show thee that Ali Mandah can do an honorable thing, unlike thyself. Thou hast expected treachery. Take thyself hence, and remember that death is over thee. Take the lesson."

With this speech Ali Mandah made a signal, and instantly armed men surrounded the three visitors. They were led away out of the underground palace and into the open air.

Here they were set at liberty with a stern command from the captain of the robber guard, not to turn from their course to the air ship.

In a few moments they were wending their way through the defile on their way back to the Crescent, somewhat surprised at the outcome of affairs.

Frank whistled softly.

"Well," he exclaimed. "This was all unexpected to me. I was sure that they would attempt to detain us."

"I am sure it was their purpose," said Azya, "for I heard the plans made. But for some reason Ali Mandah changed his mind."

"Golly! I've done glad he did," declared Pomp. "I wouldn't mind goin' back dar fo' some moh ob dat roast pig."

"Which all shows that there is such a thing as honor among thieves," quoted Frank, with a laugh. "Really, the old fellow lives in the style of a Solomon."

"On ill-gotten gains!"

"True!" agreed Frank. "But I suppose all Arabian tribes have in times past gained their position and supremacy in just such a manner!"

"Yes," admitted Azya. "Six generations ago, my ancestors were robbers. But my father is a peaceful and honorable ruler and takes from none!"

"Perhaps Ali Mandah and his Forty Thieves may turn that way some time."

"Not in this generation," said Azya. "Son of Allah! What is that!"

A shrill agonized scream burst upon the hearing of all. It was a woman's voice and a call in distress.

Without a thought as to consequences, the three adventurers sprang forward. Around a corner of the cliff they sped, and a startling sight burst upon their view.

At the foot of the cliff lay the fainting figure of a woman. Over her stood a monstrous bear of the Asiatic type.

One of his paws was upon the woman's shoulder, and in another moment his sharp fangs would have torn her face. But Azya let forth a fierce yell.

Surprised, the bear turned its head, and seeing foes coming, turned to meet them.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AZYA A CAPTIVE.

Just in time Azya and his companions had arrived.

Even as the young prince saw the bear, he recognized the victim. It was Zosia, the beautiful princess and daughter of the robber king.

Frank and Pomp were left behind by the ardent young prince to whom love gave extraordinary strength. He fell upon the bear like a whirlwind.

The monster gave him a fearful blow with its paw, which tore the flesh from his shoulder. But Azya fired point blank at the bear's belly with his revolver.

He poured the bullets without stint into the monster's carcass. But the bear is proverbial for tenacity of life.

It yielded to the fatal bullets, but not until Azya had been fearfully mangled, and fell fainting beside Zosia.

Frank and Pomp now came up, but before they could even attempt to give the prince aid, a strange thing happened.

Armed robbers sprang down from the cliff above like a whirlwind. They opened fire upon Frank and Pomp.

Only their bullet-proof armor saved the two at that moment. The bullets struck them like hail.

They were forced to retreat to the cover of bowlders near. They then answered the fire with their revolvers.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "we mustn't leave de prince in dere power! Suah's you'se bo'n, dey will kill him!"

"They would be izhuman if they should, now that he has saved the life of the princess," said Frank.

Yet he felt a thrill of alarm, for he knew the barbaric peculiarities of these savage people. He still kept up a lively fire.

Three of the robbers fell. The others vanished with the prince and Zosia. Then Frank was desperate.

He started in pursuit. For fully an hour he wandered among the defiles and recesses of the rocky region.

No trace of the robbers and their charges could he find. He had no means of knowing what had become of them.

Neither could he find the way again which led back to the palace. He wondered why the robbers did not appear and try to make himself and Pomp prisoners.

After a while he halted and said:

"It's no use, Pomp; we might as well go back to the air ship. For some reason we are not their game. They do not seem to want us."

"I specs you'se right, Marse Frank," agreed Pomp. "I've done afeared dat am de las' ob Prince Azya."

Frank made no further comment, but scanned the sky for the air ship. To his surprise he saw it just overhead.

It was easy to signal Barney, who at once descended.

In a moment more Frank had hold of the rope ladder and quickly mounted to the deck. Pomp followed him.

Barney showed his surprise and apprehension. Frank said:

"Prince Azya is in the power of the robbers. We must rescue him if we can!"

"Begorra, that we will!" cried Barney, forcibly. "Shure, an' how-iver did it happen, Mister Frank?"

Frank narrated the whole affair, to which Barney listened with surprise and interest.

But Frank was puzzled enough now to know what to do. While in this quandary he was suddenly aroused by a cry from Barney.

"Whurroo, Mister Frank!" he cried. "Wud yez look yonder, sor? Shure, it's an army comin' this way, I do believe."

Frank looked to the plain below, and west of the mountain range. He was astonished at the sight which met his gaze.

Barney had spoken of an army. That it was such was certainly true.

An enormous body of armed men were advancing toward the mountains. They marched in long files and carried banners and shining weapons.

Frank knew at once who they were. It was the army of the Sheik Suleiman.

He had been unable to remain longer at home and wait for news from the air ship. With the firm belief that his assistance would be needed, he had ordered out his whole army and marched for the stronghold of Ali Mandah.

For a moment Frank was undecided what to do. At first he had thought of going to meet the sheik and his army.

But an incident changed his decision, and he remained where he was. The distant sound of firearms was heard, and then armed men were seen running over a neighboring ledge.

They were the guards stationed at various points, giving the alarm and rushing to the palace with it.

Instantly Frank went into the pilot house and steered the ship toward them.

By doing this he hoped to be able to again locate the palace, and in this he succeeded.

He was able to see the entrance, and at once made up his mind what to do.

He went into the cavern and came out with a box of dynamite bombs. He dropped one over the rail.

It struck the overhanging ledge and shattered it to fragments. Barney could not help asking in surprise:

"Phwat are yez goin' to do, Mister Frank?"

"I am going to blow my way into thy den!" said Frank, grimly.

"Even if I have to level this mountain."

"Dat am a berry grand idea, sah!" cried Pomp, commendingly.

"Mebbe dem rapscallions come to dere senses sometime."

"If they will only give up Azya unharmed, I will desist," said the young inventor. "But if they don't, I'll blow them into bits."

Bomb followed bomb, and the whole mountain shook with the terrific explosions. Nothing could resist that fearful power



A passage way was surely being blown into the cavern palace. A well directed bomb on the roof of the structure would blow it in.

But at this moment a white flag was seen. Then out through the dense smoke and lurid flame strode a man.

It was Ali Mandah.

He held up both arms. It could be seen that his face was very white.

Frank ceased firing and allowed the air ship to descend within speaking distance.

Then he shouted in French:

"Well, m'sieur, what will you have?"

"Your surrender," said Ali Mandah, in a leering manner.

"Is that all?"

"Is it not enough?"

"It is. Quite enough to warrant us in continuing our firing."

"What do you mean to do, Effendi?"

"I mean to blow you into bits if you do not come to my terms."

Ali Mandah looked at the air ship and at the damage done by the electric bombs. Then he saw that the advantage was with the air ship's people.

"Well," he asked, "what are your terms?"

"The delivering up to us of our friend Azya, the prince, safe and sound. We will then go away."

"Will you come down and see the prince yourself? He is very badly wounded and unable to be moved."

"Then you have not murdered him?" asked Frank, bluntly.

"We are robbers, but not murderers," said Ali Mandah, with dignity. "To take the life of one who is seeking your life is not murder."

Frank was bound to admit that this was right. Yet he was not altogether prepared to trust the robber king.

"If I descend, what warrant shall I have of personal safety?" he asked.

"My word, Effendi," replied Ali Mandah with dignity.

"Be jabbers, Mither Frank," exclaimed Barney, "I'd niver do it, sor. Shure av he gets yez into his power agin afther phwat damage ye've jest done, shure he'll play a treacherous game on yez."

Frank saw that Barney was right. So he replied:

"Show your good faith by delivering the prince up to us, even though he is wounded."

"That I cannot do, Effendi," replied the robber king. "I must hold the prince a prisoner for my own personal safety. I do not fear Suleiman and all his armies, but you have the power to destroy us. If you go further with your destructive work, Prince Azya's life shall pay for it."

Frank saw the point at once, and was perplexed. He did not wish to sacrifice Azya's life.

He had now the power to drive the robbers from their den and nearly exterminate them. But it would be at the cost of Azya's life.

He tried to think of a stratagem. But for once in his life he was stuck.

The wily Ali Mandah spoke again:

"You need not fear for the life of the prince, Effendi," he said, assuringly. "No harm shall come to him unless you keep up your attack."

"What inducement can I offer then for the release of the prince?"

"When the right time comes I will set him free. Suleiman must cease his warfare upon me first. I am no worse than he. His ancestors were robber kings the same as I. But I have won success. What if I have taken plasters and a few flocks from him? He could afford to lose, for he is wealthy. But I am ready to give up my robber life and become a ruling sheik the same as himself. I will sign the bond of peace with him if he wishes. Do you take this word to him."

"Are you sincere, Ali Mandah?" asked Frank, eagerly.

"I swear it, by the soul of Allah, and by my beard."

"I will do as you request. Perhaps Suleiman will be glad to take you as his brother?"

Ali Mandah shook his head.

"It may not be," he replied. "The sheik is very hard of head and stern of heart. He seldom forgives a foe. But—you see my good intent, Effendi. If he pursues the warfare, may the blood be upon his head. Can you not see that I am fair?"

"You are!" agreed Frank.

"Ah, noble Effendi, from far away America," pleaded the robber king, "why make warfare against me? Suleiman will not thank thee. He will likely behead thee in return for thy service. Swear to help Ali Mandah, and he will make of thee the richest prince in Arabia. With thy air ship we will conquer the Sultan. All things will be possible!"

"That will not be possible," replied Frank, firmly. "I am not in Arabia for conquest. I am here to help Suleiman rid his kingdom of your robber band. That is my pledge."

## CHAPTER X.

### TREACHERY.

ALI MANDAH's dark face clouded, and his eyes flashed. For a moment he seemed about to break out in anger.

But he curbed himself, and replied:

"At least take my word of grace and friendship to Suleiman. Kiss him for me upon the shoulder, and say that Ali Mandah is henceforth his brother."

"I will do that," replied Frank.

The robber king vanished among the rocks, and Frank said to Barney:

"Bear down for the army on yonder plain. We will see what Suleiman has to say."

The air ship sailed down from the heights, and was soon over the plain. Frank caused it to descend into the midst of the sheik's army.

Sheik Suleiman himself rode quickly up to the rail, mounted on a beautiful Arab charger.

His face was eager and flushed, and he asked:

"Well, Effendi, what news have you? Are the robbers brought to terms?"

"They seek peace with you," replied Frank.

"Peace!" exclaimed Suleiman, in utter amazement. "Ali Mandah asks for peace?"

"He does, noble sheik."

"But—why is this?"

"Ah, he says that he is done with robber life. He seeks to become an honorable sheik like yourself. He asks for your brotherhood and swears eternal friendship."

"Can this be true?" exclaimed Suleiman. "You think there is no treachery?"

"That I cannot say. We visited him in his underground palace. He feasted us like princes and suffered us to go safely away."

"That looks like friendship," cried Suleiman. "Well, if he is sincere. But where is Azya, the light of my life?"

"Ah, noble sheik, he was torn by a bear, and now lies wounded in the palace of the robber king."

Suleiman gave a cry of distress and fear. Then Frank told him all about the incident with the bear and the lovely Zosia.

The sheik drew a deep breath of relief when Frank assured him that Azya could not be mortally wounded. He dropped from his horse and said:

"Oh, Great Dweller of the Sky. Take me to Ali Mandah. Let me fall upon his shoulder as a brother, for he has cared for my son and is beloved of me henceforth."

In a moment Suleiman was aboard the air ship. Orders were given to his soldiers to remain where they were.

The Crescent sped back over the mountain wall until once more it hovered over the entrance to the robber king's palace.

But nobody was there to meet them.

Azya had flung himself upon the bear with but one purpose uppermost in his breast, and this was to rescue the lovely Zosia, even at the sacrifice of his own life.

And in this, as we have seen, he succeeded.

The brute died ere it could inflict the least harm upon the princess. But it nigh cost Azya his life.

For the brute had torn him dreadfully. His loss of blood was most frightful.

The robbers had dragged him with Zosia into the cavern. At once Ali Mandah and the Forty Thieves surrounded the party.

The robber king was overjoyed at the safety of his daughter, but maddened at sight of Azya, for he had not understood the circumstances at once.

Seeing the wounded young prince lying on the cavern floor, he had given swift and savage orders to his servants.

At the moment it ran in his brain that Azya was alone responsible for Zosia's peril.

Quickly the robber servants ran in with a block and an ax. Azya was dragged to it and his neck placed upon the block.

Then the ax was held over him.

In another moment Prince Azya would have been in another world. But just then Zosia opened her eyes.

She saw the horrible ax, and a fearful scream pealed from her white lips.

In spite of her recent faintness, she sprang up and rushed to the block. She threw herself across the insensible form of her rescuer.

"No, no, no!" she shrieked. "Allah, forbid! You must not kill him! Kill me, but spare his life!"

The sensation created was most profound. The executioner fell back and Ali Mandah was petrified with surprise.

"Bismillah!" he exclaimed, in sheer astonishment. "Is this my daughter upon the carcass of this dog? Arise, or forever incur thy father's curse!"

"Better a father's curse than ingratitude to my preserver!" cried the young girl.

"Your preserver!" exclaimed the robber king. "What do you mean, girl?"

"That he it was who saved my life from the bear!" cried Zosia.

"Oh, father, give his life to me. Let me anoint him with my gratitude and set him free, though he is our foe!"

Ali Mandah was quite overcome or professed to be so when he learned the truth.

He lifted Zosia in his arms, and said:

"I will refuse the light of my life nothing. He shall live and his life shall be yours."

"Allah be praised!" said the princess.

Then she had him placed upon a silken couch, and his wounds were dressed. After a while the young prince opened his eyes and looked up into the lovely face above him.

Then a great joy stole over him. Pain was absorbed in pleasure, and he was in paradise.

Tenderly she caressed and cared for him, and at times, when she deemed him unconscious, pressed soft lips to his brow.



Love flowed in a subtle bond between them, though unprofessed by either. That was a halcyon hour.

It was later in the day that Zosia heard a great stir outside the cavern, and then the curtains of the chamber were hastily thrust aside.

Her father and another richly dressed and kingly personage entered. The latter was Suleiman.

He gave a great cry and rushed to the side of his son. Azya opened his eyes and embraced his loving parent.

That was a happy hour for all. Frank Reade, Jr., waited just outside the chamber door.

When he learned that Azya was alive, he was overjoyed. Presently Suleiman came out and said:

"Oh, noble Effendi, my son asks for thee. Wilt thou not come!"

"Certainly!" replied Frank.

In another moment he was by the side of the wounded young prince. Azya's face, though it bore marks of pain, was radiant.

"Oh, my great and kind benefactor," he said. "A happy hour is come. My father tells me that the great Ali Mandah offers brotherhood to him, and will give up his career as robber king, and obtain from the Sultan, by purchase, the title of Emir. We shall be all one united province, and, what is more—the beautiful Zosia loves me. She shall be my princess!"

Frank was delighted with this turn in affairs.

"Prince Azya," he said, "I am indeed overjoyed to hear of this. I am sure you will all be very happy. There is nothing too good for me to wish you!"

At this moment an attendant entered the chamber, and said:

"Our noble lord, Ali Mandah, gives order that all here shall meet him in the throne room without delay!"

"It is to make the brotherhood compact!" said Azya eagerly. "Let men carry me there on this litter."

This was done. Four servants carried the litter and Zosia walked beside Azya.

Frank and Suleiman with bared heads walked behind. In this way they entered the throne room.

Ali Mandah sat upon the great gilded chair. He was in his imperial robes, as robber king. But upon his ugly face there was a gloomy shadow.

The prince's litter was set down and the attendants fell back. Frank and Suleiman stood before the robber king.

"Noble brother," said Suleiman. "We pay thee homage!"

"It is well," said Ali Mandah.

Then he clapped his hands.

Instantly, from various entrances the Forty Thieves appeared. The robber king indicated them with his sceptre and said:

"Know you, Suleiman, that these are my nobles, men of the highest birth in Arabia, and to whom I owe my kingdom. You have offered me a brotherhood, but they deny it me!"

For an instant a silence like that of the tomb reigned in the court. Suleiman's tall figure towered higher.

He glanced from one to another of the Forty Thieves. His gaze was like that of an eagle.

"And who are these," he asked with disdain, "that they can refuse a brotherhood with Suleiman?"

"Death!" roared the Forty Thieves.

Forty swords flashed in the air, but Ali Mandah's voice rang out:

"Back, by Allah!"

Instantly the weapons were sheathed. Then Ali Mandah smiled in his cruel way and said:

"For this Allah cannot hold me responsible, noble Suleiman. The will of my forty friends I cannot forego. It was a fatal hour which brought you to this place."

"Explain thy words, son of a dog!" cried Suleiman, unsheathing his scimeter. "I am the son of Mahomet and I have no fear."

Again Ali Mandah smiled in his cruel way.

"There can be no brotherhood!" he said.

Prince Azya gave a gurgling wild cry and tried to rise, but fell back. Zosia fell by his litter, speaking words of comfort.

As for Suleiman, his fine lips curled in contempt.

"I owe no allegiance to any forty slaves of mine!" he said.

Ali Mandah's eyes flashed.

"Nor I!" he cried. "Know, thou fool, that it is also the will of Ali Mandah."

"What!" roared the sheik. "Does this mean treachery?"

"It means that my hour has come!" thundered Ali Mandah. "Know the truth, that all the hordes of the Crescent cannot save you now, Suleiman Ayotr, Sheik of El Deraveh. All the wealth of the world cannot ransom you from me. I will suck your veins, drink your life blood, and rear my kingdom upon the ashes and the blood of yours. Thus does Ali Mandah make himself the greatest ruler of Arabia!"

Words cannot explain the situation or the scene which followed. The treachery of the robber king was something beyond comprehension.

## CHAPTER XI.

### IN CAPTIVITY.

FRANK READE, JR., was not the least dazed of the party. He could hardly believe his senses.

He was familiar with the peculiarities of the Arabians in general, but he had never dreamed of the violating of his word and his truce

in such a manner by Ali Manhah, whom he had hitherto regarded as at least honorable in matter of his word.

The danger which now impended over all was of the most frightful kind. Suleiman, though brave as a lion, was white and rigid.

He knew at once that he was in the power of his sworn foe.

There was not the least chance for escape, not the least hope in appealing to the honor of his villainous captor.

Too late he regretted his foolishness in having come so blindly and unprepared into the enemy's stronghold.

Better far to have remained outside, to have met Ali Mandah half way and negotiated with him. Better to have given his kingdom as ransom for Azya, his beloved son.

As for Azya, he was in a state of frenzy. But he was too weak to make action.

However, Frank Reade, Jr., now made an effort to turn the tide.

"Remember, Ali Mandah," he said in French, which the robber king understood, "you are staining your soul with an infamy which God will not overlook, nor the world allow to go unavenged. You will pay dearly for all this."

Ali Mandah laughed jeeringly.

"Ah, American Effendi," he said, contemptuously, "you could talk to me bravely when your air ship hung over my palace with its accursed thunderbolts. But now the tables have turned, and Ali Mandah is on top."

"You forget," cried Frank, "that my air ship yet hangs over this place, and that if harm comes to us, not one stone shall be left upon another here!"

"You do not know," retorted the robber king, "that your air ship and your two servants are captives in the den of without. They cannot escape."

For a moment it seemed to Frank as if the room whirled about him. He could hardly believe his senses.

Barney and Pomp captured, and the air ship in the power of the robbers! Here was a frightful turning of tables.

He realized now also, as had Suleiman, what fools they had been in trusting themselves in the power of Ali Mandah. The end must certainly be death.

Frank could see no way of escape. He was a brave man, but his heart sank at the prospect.

Ali Mandah made a motion to one of his attendants.

At once he vanished. A moment later he returned with others.

They carried a furnace and anvil with heavy chains and gyves. A burly smith began to beat upon the anvil and blow the fire.

It was evident that the prisoners were to be chained. One of the attendants advanced with manacles.

He was about to place them upon Suleiman's wrists. But Zosia stepped between them.

She extended her own lovely arms.

"Put them upon me first," she said.

The smith and the attendants fell back in affright. A murmur went up from the Forty Thieves and Ali Mandah sprang from his throne.

"What is this?" he roared, glaring at Zosia. "Get thee to the harem, thou false daughter."

But Zosia faced him like a lion. Her eyes were like burning coals and her bosom swelled like a raging sea.

"I refuse to obey thee!" she cried, in a full ringing voice. "From this hour I denounce thee! Thou art no longer father of mine!"

For a moment Ali Mandah bent like a reed in a storm before this powerful denunciation.

His face turned chalky white, his throat rattled and he flashed forth his scimeter. The most unspeakable rage held mastery of him.

He might have slain his daughter then and there but for the voices of the Forty Thieves, which were raised in protest. Several of them rushed between him and his would-be victim.

"That I should live to see that ungrateful hussy denounce me," he fumed. "What dost thou mean, child of a demon possessed?"

"It is thou who art possessed of a demon!" replied Zosia, forcibly.

"See what thou hast done? These men come here in thine honor, and by thy word, and thou wilt condemn them to death. Thou art not father of mine longer! I loathe thee, for it is written in the Koran that no man may hope for Heaven and break his word!"

Azya had made a tremendous effort to get from his litter. But faintness overcame him.

Frank and Suleiman were ready to instantly sell their lives in defense of this brave young girl, who had so nobly defended them.

Suleiman gazed at her with worship.

"Ah, had I but such a daughter," he cried. "The pearls without price would never buy her!"

"Live!" shrieked Ali Mandah. "Thou shalt all live! I have not got ready yet for thee to die. Put the shackles upon them, ye dogs, and shackle her to them also. If she is no longer my daughter, then she shall be my slave."

The brutal attendants hastened to obey this order.

Quickly manacles were forged upon the wrists of Frank and Suleiman. Then Zosia was also shackled to the chain which bound them all.

Azya, even though helpless, was dragged from the litter and also manacled. The prisoners were then led away. Azya being carried by a couple of attendants.

Through dark cavern passages they were led, and finally cast into a dark corner. There they were left to their own thoughts and sufferings.



The section of chain between each prison was several yards in length, so that each could move about with some degree of ease.

But their sensations were dismal and melancholy. They were sure that Ali Mandah had merely granted them this respite to prepare for them a fearful death.

"The dog!" exclaimed Suleiman, in anger. "If I could but meet him on even terms, I would do the world a service and rid it of a fiend!"

Azya had returned to consciousness and was groaning with his wounds.

Zosia was bending over him and giving him solicitous care. Her heart was very heavy.

"Oh, thou pearl without price!" moaned Azya; "would it were in my power to defend thee, but Allah forbids."

"I have foresworn my father," she said, rigidly. "Henceforth he is dead to me. I have nought to live for, and death will be merciful."

Azya grasped her hands, feverishly.

"Oh, life of my life—soul of my soul!" he cried, passionately; "thou hast me, who loves thee, who adores thee beyond compare! Oh, thou art mine—if not in life, we will be with each other in Heaven!"

She wept upon his bosom, and thus they became avowed lovers. Frank and Suleiman, much wearied, slept.

Thus the hours passed, until an attendant brought them water and dried figs—a frugal repast.

However, they were glad to partake of it, and were somewhat refreshed.

Then Zosia, who had become calmer, began to move the manacles on her delicate wrists.

To her surprise she found that they would slip partly down upon her hands, as slender almost as the wrist. She made several efforts to draw her hand through.

This pained her greatly, but she did not desist.

So, of a sudden she gave a little cry and held up one hand.

"I am free!" she said.

This announcement created a sensation. Suleiman was beside himself with joy.

"Perhaps, fair maid, you will find the way to liberate us?" he asked.

"I will not spare my life to save you!" she said.

After much effort she drew the other hand also out of the manacle. She was now free.

Words cannot express the joy of all. At once plans were made.

There was no easy way for Zosia to break the manacles of the others. But she might obtain the means to do it. So she decided to creep stealthily back to the main rooms of the underground palace, and if possible find the heavy hammers and chisels of the smith.

Azya kissed her farewell and the others knelt and prayed for her success. The next moment she was out of sight in the gloom.

Zosia was a girl of rare courage and much fertility of resource.

Several daring plans other than the simple breaking of the prisoners' manacles had occurred to her. She was determined to carry them out.

As she crept noiselessly into the main part of the palace, she heard the sounds of revelry.

In the main chamber was a banquet table loaded with wines. Here Ali Mandah and the Forty Thieves were engaged in carousal.

They were celebrating the success of their nefarious game. All were maudlin drunk.

Most of the servants and attendants were in the same state. This gave Zosia her chance.

She crept even to the cavern entrance. There in the defile she saw the air ship.

It had not been looted, but was tied to the cliff with ropes. No doubt Ali Mandah had declared it his own property, and meant with its use to try further conquests, as he had declared.

The two companions of Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, as Zosia knew, were imprisoned on board the air ship. The guard at the cavern entrance was asleep.

She silently abstracted his keys from his girdle.

It was easy for her to flit across the defile in the darkness. Then she reached the air ship's deck.

The guard was pacing the opposite side of the deck, and apprehending no danger. Zosia easily glided in at the cabin door.

Barney and Pomp, with manacles, were lying in the middle of the cabin floor. Zosia reached their side.

She could not speak their tongue, but she implied silence by means of a hushed exclamation. Then she unlocked their manacles and freed them.

Now, all were in a quandary.

As Zosia could not speak English, for a time it was difficult for her to explain to Barney and Pomp what her mission was.

But she knew French, and fortunately Barney had a smattering of this. It proved the necessary open sesame.

In whispered tones Zosia told them all. Barney and Pomp were much excited, but glad to know that Frank and the others were yet alive.

"Faith, we'll rescue them!" declared Barney, resolutely. "Bad luck to the omadhouns! When we get after them with the air ship, shure they'll think the ind av the worruld has come fer shure!"

Zosia was faint with joy at the prospect. But her strength soon returned when she remembered what was before her.

It was necessary for her to return now with the tools essential for the release of the other prisoners.

Barney was anxious to go with her, but Pomp said:

"It will be easier, chile, fo' her to go alone. Mebbe dey might notice yo' whar dey wouldn't her. De place fo' yo' an' I am right heah abo'd de air ship."

Barney saw that this was right. But now a new peril arose.

Another guard had come aboard the air ship. His step sounded right at the cabin door.

## CHAPTER XII.

### WHICH ENDS THE STORY.

For a moment it seemed as if they must be betrayed. Then the voice of the other guard was heard.

The two exchanged remarks, and finally the relief, for such he was, turned away without entering the cabin and crossed to the other side of the deck.

It was Zosia's chance.

"Now, miss!" whispered Barney, "shure, an' may luck go wid yez!"

Zosia, like a shadow, flitted out of the cabin. She reached the gangway and climbed down.

Barney and Pomp cowered in the cabin until well assured that she was in safety.

Then they kept watch of the cavern entrance, hoping at any moment to see the three prisoners appear.

Meanwhile, Zosia had again passed the sleeping guard and safely entered the cavern. Yet the danger was not over for her.

She knew where the smith's tools were kept and set out to procure them. But just before the entrance to the smithy and forge, three drunken wretches lay on the cavern floor.

They were cursing and reviling frightfully, and Zosia did not dare to approach them, much less to let them know of her presence.

Here was a delay upon which she had not counted.

The drunken robbers showed no disposition to change their position and continued to remain where they were. There was no other way to get into the smithy.

But they were maudlin and the chances were good that they might soon fall asleep. So Zosia waited with some patience.

Time passed slowly.

It seemed an hour ere drunken slumber came upon them. When finally assured that they were asleep, Zosia made brave action.

It was necessary to step over them to get into the smithy.

But she did this so lightly and noiselessly that they were not disturbed.

She made some noise in getting the iron tools, but happily this did not arouse them.

Once more the brave girl was in the main cavern with the means in her possession of freeing the prisoners. She lost no time.

Down the cavern passages she flitted. The tools were heavy and made her arms and back weary.

But she kept bravely on.

It seemed an interminable distance, and a number of times she was sure that she had taken the wrong passage and was lost.

But suddenly she heard a distant groan. At once she raised her voice slightly, and spoke:

"In the name of Allah!"

A joyful cry answered her.

"Allah be praised!"

"God bless her!" exclaimed Frank. "She has performed a brave deed!"

In another moment the young girl had laid the tools at the feet of Frank and Suleiman.

Then she fell beside Azya and kissed his fevered brow.

It was but a moment's work for Frank to dispel the darkness with his pocket lantern. Then the chisel was placed to his manacles, and Suleiman rained blow after blow upon them with the iron hammer.

The manacles soon parted and Frank was free. Next Suleiman was freed in like manner.

Then came Azya's turn.

The young prince was soon liberated. Zosia now gained her feet.

"Most noble sheik," she said, addressing Suleiman. "It is possible to go safely to the air ship if we use care. My father and the Forty Thieves are all drunk, and doubtless ere this asleep!"

"Then let us go. Oh, light of Paradise," said Suleiman. "Wilt thou lead the way?"

Zosia proceeded to do this. Frank and Suleiman carried Azya between them.

Thus they proceeded for some distance.

It seemed as if success was assured them, when a startling and unlooked-for thing occurred.

The distant roar of a thunderous explosion caused the roof and walls of the cavern to tremble.

Then loud yells and cries and the crash of firearms followed.

Zosia came to a halt. Her heart was beating like a trip hammer.

"Alas!" she exclaimed. "We must go no farther in this direction."

"What does that mean?" asked Frank.

"They have discovered the escape of the air ship men!" said Zosia. "They will come here next. Let us not linger."

"What shall we do?" asked Suleiman.

"I know another way out of this cave!" replied the young girl. "I beg you all to follow me, quickly."

Zosia turned back and entered a side passage.



This she followed until it began to trend upwards. Soon a patch of light shone above.

Then suddenly the fugitives came out into open air.

The light of morning was in the sky. The thunder of explosion crashed upon their ears.

Frank and Suleiman rested a moment from carrying Azya. Frank looked upwards and saw a pathway of glaring radiance.

"The air ship!" he exclaimed. "Heaven be praised, we are saved!"

"Amen, oh, Allah!" said Suleiman, sinking upon his knees.

After the departure of Zosia, Barney and Pomp crouched in the air ship's cabin, watching for the possible coming of the prisoners.

They had armed themselves with rifles, and were prepared to defend the air ship with their lives.

But Zosia's delay at the smithy had proved fatal to her chances for a safe return.

The night began to fall and the light of morning to appear. Barney became uneasy.

"Be me sow!" he ejaculated, "it looks bad for thim! Phwy don't they cum?"

"Golly! mebbe de gal hab been captured herself," said Pomp.

"Bejabers, I reckon we'll not take many more chances."

"No, sah!"

"It won't be safe, shure!"

"Wha' am we gwine to do?"

Before Barney could answer, the guard suddenly appeared in the doorway. It was a thrilling moment for him as well as the prisoners.

He saw at once that they were free. They saw that they were discovered and the crisis had come.

The guard let out a yell of alarm and raised his pistol. The bullet shaved Pomp's skull.

But Barney's rifle ball the next moment ended his career.

From the cavern there sprang armed men in response to the guard's call. But by this time Barney was in the pilot house.

He turned on the current and set the rotascopes buzzing. Then with an ax he dodged out on deck and severed the ropes which bound the Crescent.

Bullets rattled against the cabin sides, but the high bulwarks protected Barney. Then the air ship gave a great lurch and started upward.

Several of the outlaws grabbed the rail, but fell back and were crushed a hundred feet below on the rocks.

Up into the air bounded the Crescent. Barney shut off speed, however, and allowed it to remain at a height of a few hundred feet.

Then he cried:

"Git the bombs, naygur! Shure, we'll blow thim all into kingdom come!"

Down showered the bombs into the defile. They made terrible havoc.

Soon human life was not safe in the place. One of the bombs rent the roof of the underground palace.

The robbers rushed out only to meet death. The slaughter was terrific. Suddenly a white flag appeared below.

Barney and Pomp ceased firing.

"It's a surrender they'll make!" cried the Celt. "Av they mean it, well an' good! If not, shure we'll exterminate the whole lot av thim!"

"Golly! I guess dey be done glad to gib up de prisoners now!" cried Pomp.

The air ship was lowered to within speaking distance. Then the robber king, Ali Mandah, bleeding from many wounds, crawled out of the debris.

In French he shouted:

"In Allah's name give us mecry! We are outdone!"

"So I thought," replied Barney, in broken French. "Will yez give up the prisoners yez have!"

"I cannot, for they are no longer here."

Barney turned white.

"Yez don't mane that they're dead, do yez?" he asked.

"No, Effendi. They have escaped!"

"Do yez hear that?" cried Barney, turning to Pomp. "Now, phwat do yez think av it? Phwere are they?"

"Golly, how yo' s'pecs I kin tell!"

"Whurroo!"

At this moment Barney chanced to run his eye over the mountain wall. He beheld that which made his veins tingle.

There were four persons on a great ledge signaling him. They were Frank, Suleiman, Azya and Zosia.

It can be easily imagined that Barney was not long in responding to their call.

The air ship descended quickly, and they were taken aboard. Azya was carried tenderly into the cabin and left in Zosia's care.

"Allah be praised," declared Suleiman. "What say the robbers?"

"They have surrendered, sor!" cried Barney. "Shure, av they hadn't, I'd av blown thim all to perdition!"

Suleiman was overjoyed.

He embraced Barney and said:

"I will take them to El-Deraveh and hang them. The arch traitor, Ali Mandah, shall be flayed alive!"

"Ugh!" exclaimed Frank. "Why not shoot them where they are? I don't believe in human torture."

"No," said Suleiman, generously. "If they will leave Arabia forever, they shall have their lives."

"Tell them that," said Frank.

The air ship returned to the defile, and Suleiman addressed the survivors of the robber band.

It was a surprise to them to be given their lives. They readily agreed to the terms.

"But Ali Mandah?" asked the sheik. "What has he to say?"

One of the Forty Thieves raised his voice and replied:

"Ali Mandah will answer to Allah! He is dead!"

At this Suleiman drew back, and Zosia fell to weeping. But the sheik comforted her.

"Henceforth you are daughter of mine," he said. "My son shall rule after me, and you shall be queen."

Then they left the robber den. The air ship sailed down to the plain, and Suleiman ordered his troops to return to El Deraveh.

The robbers fled from the province of El Deraveh in great terror. They were heard of no more.

From the underground palace of Ali Mandah much wealth was taken. It added to the power of El Deraveh.

Sheik Suleiman rewarded the American aerial voyagers with money and many costly gifts.

Frank, with Barney and Pomp, spent a month in the Arabian city, where they had a jolly time. No pains were spared to entertain them.

Azya quickly recovered from his wounds and the lovely Zosia became his happy bride before the Crescent sailed away.

One day Frank said to Barney and Pomp:

"We have stayed long enough in Arabia, have we not?"

Both gave assent.

"Then," said Frank, "we will sail for home to-morrow by the way of Eastern Asia and the North Pacific Ocean!"

This was an exciting prospect. It was several months before the Crescent reached Readestown.

But the voyagers finally reached home well and happy. The entire trip had been a success.

They had sailed around the world and across Arabia meanwhile. This was a sufficient feat for some time to come.

Yet Frank went to work at once upon a new invention as soon as he had arrived home. What it is, we will leave it to time and opportunity to divulge.





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